

4

EPOCH-MAKING BOOKS IN BRITISH SURGERY

BY

SIR D'ARCY POWER, K.B.E., F.S.A.

THE WHOLE COURSE OF CHIRURGERIE
COMPILED BY PETER LOWE,
SCOTCHMAN

[Reprinted from THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF SURGERY,
Vol. XV, No. 60, 1928.]

BRISTOL: JOHN WRIGHT & SONS LTD.

LONDON: SIMPKIN MARSHALL LTD.

1928

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF SURGERY

VOL. XV.

APRIL, 1928.

No. 60.

EPOCH-MAKING BOOKS IN BRITISH SURGERY.

BY SIR D'ARCY POWER, K.B.E., LONDON.

IV.

THE WHOLE COURSE OF CHIRURGERIE COMPILED BY PETER LOWE, SCOTCHMAN.

PETER LOWE describes himself as Doctor in the Faculty of Surgery in Paris and Surgeon in Ordinary to the most victorious and Christian King of France and Navarre. The first edition of the book was published in 1597, the second in 1612, both being printed by Thomas Purfoot during the lifetime of Lowe; the third and fourth editions appeared posthumously. The first edition is a small book without illustrations; the second, third, and fourth were greatly enlarged, and have woodcuts copied from Guillemeau and Ambroise Paré.

The book differs from those of Gale and Clowes because it is written for the use of students who were going to be examined in surgery, whilst Lowe's predecessors had written for those who were already in practice. It was compiled, as Master Peter Lowe says, in the second edition, for the use of his son John, "because I am mindful to cause you to remain in Paris for your further instruction and passing of the degrees there accustomed in the said Art [of surgery] for the which I will in these three books following, as also in every general chapter set up as briefly as I can the form and method that the Doctors of Chirurgerie in Paris useth in their first examination—called the examination tentative—where the Provost of the said College and six other Masters that he will choose will examine you exactly upon the whole ground of Chirurgerie." John, however, never entered medicine. Lowe had already published a small work on the Spanish Disease, and he intended to write a treatise on the sickness of women; another on Infantment and a Poor Man's Guide. None of these works can now be traced, so that it is probable they were never issued, perhaps never written. "The whole Course of Surgery" is partly a catechism, the interlocutors being John Cointret, Dean of the Faculty of Surgery in Paris, and Peter Lowe his scholar in the first edition, Peter Lowe

and his son John in the second and subsequent editions ; partly a series of more elaborated chapters, some of which give details of his own experiences. We learn from the book that most of his surgery was the result of military service, that it was not very extensive, and that he was somewhat timid. He was an honest, straightforward person who had as hearty a hatred of quacks and unlicensed practitioners as Gale and Clowes. Thus, in answer to the question, "What method is to be observed of the Chirurgian in working his operations?" the answer is, "First to know the disease, next to do the operation as soon as may be, surely, without false promises or deceit to heal things that cannot be healed, for there are some, who void of knowledge and skill promise for lucre to heal infirmities being ignorant both of the disease and the remedies thereof. These faults be often committed of some who, usurping the name of Chirurgian, being unworthy thereof, have scarce the skill to cut a beard which properly pertaineth to their trade."

There are many interesting chapters, and not the least is that dealing with the tonsils. It is headed, "Of the Tumor of the Amigdalles, called by the Greeks *Parischimia* and by Latines *Tonsillæ*", in which the operation of tracheotomy is described. After detailing the symptoms and constitutional treatment he says: "If it aposthume [suppurates], as often happeneth, it must be opened with a lancet, if the tumor doth so augment that the sick is in danger to suffocke then thou shalt make incision on the trachearter, betwixt the third and fourth ring, cutting only the membrane that holdeth them together and not the proper substance of the cartilage, so the air shall avoid [escape], put in a tent of silver that is hollow into it till the inflammation be past, thereafter close up the wound. This was practised by Andrew Scot one of the King of Scotland's Chirurgions in Paris most cunningly. To do this operation thou shalt hold backward the patient's head, lift up the skin with the hand and cut it in length, so the membrane shall be discovered, then make your incision with a bistourie in the said place; during which time, use externally, medicaments about the neck that are made of barley flour, lint seed and fenegrec as shall be found most expedient according to the degree of the malady. This operation of incision is very dangerous if it be not well made by reason of the flux of blood which often doth happen as also for the nerves which pass that way. I cured an apothecary in Paris after this method and he healed."

Speaking of pleurisy he says: "If by these remedies the pain doth not cease, neither that ye perceive any evacuation of the humour, neither by the mouth, urine, nor fundament it is to be suspected to turn into Empiem which is a collection of matter between the ribs and the region of the lights, sometime with corruption hereof, for the which we make incision either by cautery or lancet but rather by the cautery, for neither doth it close so soon, nor is so dolorous. The opening shall be between the third and fourth of the true ribs, beginning at the nethermost and so counting upward, six inches from the ridge of the back. If ye see tumour eminent in any place of the thorax, open it in the most convenient place. When it is open put in a hollow tent either of silver or lead. Let not all the matter avoid at one time, but little by little as other apostumes." Ten years later he adds in the second edition: "This cure is rare and seldom practised, yet after this method I did cure John



PETER LOWE'S TOMB.

Buchan, Maister of the Song School in Glasgow, who was heavily grieved with a watery or congealed humor collected under the sternum."

As regards tumours in the scrotum he recognized encysted hydrocele of the cord, for he says: "The signs are, the tumour is clear and becometh long, still in one estate, not painful heavy, sometime hard and is known by holding the cod between thee and the candle and being enclosed in membranes it appeareth to be a third testicle. As for the cure you must make incision in the side of the Codde, eschewing the testicle, put a tent in it and dress it twice a day, keep it open till the humor be evacuated, use remedies anodious [anodynes] for to appease the dolor and cicatrise it as other wounds."

Lowe was greatly in advance of his time in describing an operation for the relief of strangulated hernia. The operation for the cure of reducible inguinal hernia was often done, but even two hundred years later the unfortunate patient with a strangulated hernia was allowed to die unrelieved. Speaking of an intestinal rupture Lowe says: "The signs are these;—there cometh inflammation and the more ye press to reduce it, the inflammation is the greater, so it changeth the colour which is an evil sign, swooning and voyding of matter at the mouth are evil signs, and if the intestine be not reduced the patient dieth which happeneth through the narrowness of the dilatation. As for the cure, first rub the codd with oil of camomile and lay the sick on his back in such sort that his arse be higher than his head, reducing with thy hand little by little, pressing most on the place where it descended. If the fæcal matter let [prevent] the reduction use the remedies set down in Bubonocoele and clysters to discharge the intestine; if by these remedies the intestine do not reduce but the matter wax hard with great dolor, ye shall make incision in the upper part of the cod, eschewing the intestine, thereafter put a little piece of wood up by the prolongation of the peritoneum near the hole of descent, the piece of wood must be round on one side and flat on the other, whereon ye shall make the rest of your incision and rub the descent with a little oil, so it shall easily reduce. If then it reduce not, the peritoneum must be incised and use the cautery Gastrographick and handle it as other wounds. This operation must not be used but in great necessity and when the sick is strong, prognosticating still of the danger ne fefellisse aut ignorasse videaris." (It is clear that he was possessed of the native Scottish caution.) "Being reduced it must with bandages and astringent fomentations bee retained."

Lowe did not hesitate to recommend operations for the cure of varicocele and of varicose veins. "The signs of varicocele are, the repletion of the veins, sometime few in number, sometime many wrapped together like a vine branch, soft in touch and returning into the belly by pressing on the didyme. The judgments [signs] are it is without dolor, most dangerous and difficil to be cured. The cure shall be first purging the body of melancholick, then bleed if need be, thereafter make incision on the scroton the breadth of two fingers in the place of the varix, thereafter make pass a needle with double thread under the varix one in the upper part of the wound, another in the lower part, leaving an inch betwixt, then open the varix and evacuate the humor contained; if there be any moe do the like, that done knit the thread and handle the wound as others."

The chapter on varicose veins is equally good and practical. It is headed, "Of the tumor in the veins of the legs called Varicæ". "Varix is a dilatation of the vein greater than natural, which happeneth in divers parts of the body, as temples, belly, under the navel, on the testicles and matrix but chiefly in the legs, which is sometime one vein, sometime divers together, full of thick, burnt, melancholick blood letting [preventing] action of the place. The cause is abundance of the melancholick humor, vehement exercise as leaping, wrestling, carrying of great burthens, strokes, falls, torments and such like. The signs may be seen by the greatness of the veins, which commonly are blacker than the natural; The judgements, those that are intern are incurable and not to be touched. The cure is diversely set down by divers authors, some counsel to incise them in divers places according to the circumvolution and let them bleed, then to close up and bind the wound as in other bleedings, resting that day and if they swell again do the place with a little ink the skin above the vein, thereafter take up the skin with thy hands and incise in the midst thereof; then let it go, that the vein may be seen and pass two needles as in the varicose hernia. Let it bleed a quantity and knit it. Let the thread fall off of itself without drawing it by force and cure the wound as others."

We are indebted to Mr. Annan, of Glasgow, for the photograph of the monument of Maister Peter Lowe in St. Mungo's churchyard.

